

"You did not mean that—about publishing it?"

"You knew I was a reporter?" he replied stolidly.

She unfolded his card and read it again, bewildered.

"Yes—I knew it of course. But I did not think—I did not understand. I just wanted to talk. It relieved me so much to talk. I felt much better a minute ago. But I did not suppose—oh!"

"Why, a paper could not print that," she continued uncertainly. "Could it? Do they ever print things like that? It was not for that I talked to you. I just had to talk."

Kent, who had been writing steadily, shivered as if from a chill.

Some of the rest of it he did not remember so clearly. But that did not matter much; the story was told. She cried very little, and that seemed to him queer; most of the time her eyes were dry and unmoving. He remembered that some of her talk was incoherent.

He arose, pausing for an instant to look down at the crumpled figure. There was an unnatural fascination in the misery of this creature who could not understand. A voice from somewhere seemed to be crying: "Thief!"

And then he cursed himself for the pause, for she was on her knees—to him!—her white face upturned, the desperation of terror in her eyes. The wrinkled letter lay on the rug in front of her, a hand clutched convulsively toward him, and she was moaning:

"No, no, no! You can not! Don't you understand?"

Kent dropped his fingers from the keys, swiftly reviewing in his mind what he had written. Well, the whole loathsome thing was there, naked and quivering.

"How about it, Kent?" Haskins' metallic voice roused him.

"Here it is," he said, dropping it on the blotter. "I haven't read it over, but I guess it runs straight."

"Never mind; I'll read it," said Haskins. "Stay around a while."

Kent went back to his desk, slid the typewriter out of sight, and lighted a cigaret. He watched Haskins turn the last page and lay it on top of the others.

Haskins was sitting motionless, gazing out of the window. Kent had never seen him motionless before, and the thing struck him as incongruous. Then he started suddenly and glanced at the clock.

"Kent!" he called.

Kent went over to the desk.

"Have you spoken to anybody about this story, Kent?" he asked, suddenly.

Kent shook his head.

"Nobody in the office?" The tone was searching.

"No; nobody."

Haskins picked up the pile of typewritten sheets and slowly tore it across. He laid one pile upon the other and tore them again. A third time he repeated the operation. Then he dropped the pieces into the basket.

"If you ever speak about that story you'll be fired, Kent," he said fiercely. "Do you understand? And I'll resign."

"I understand," said Kent, nodding.

"I'll allow you for your work," he snapped, swinging around his chair and looking out of the window again. "Get your lunch, if you want to. That's all."

A second later he called Kent back. "You can send her word, if you like," he said in a curious voice.

"All right," answered Kent. "I think—"

Haskins whirled on him.

"Stop thinking! Don't bother me!" he broke out. "And—oh, damn it, Kent, don't do anything like that again."

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"Our new bookkeeper can't seem to see a mistake when it's pointed out to him." "He's a ball fan. Don't allude to 'em as mistakes; allude to 'em as bonehead plays. He'll understand that all right."—Kansas City Journal